[I Ain't No Midwife]

I AIN't NO MIDWIFE - Revised Copy sent to [?? 6-14-39?]

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S.B.H. I AIN't NO MIDWIFE

“You'll have to come up on the porch and set down whilst I washes if you wants to talk to me,” Mamie announced, when I found her in the backyard tending the fire around the boiling washpot. “I meant to wash outdoors in the sunshine,” she continued, “but my husband and daughter got off befo' I had a chanst to get 'em to move my wash bench off of the porch for me.”

“I'm surprised to find you at home, Mamie,” I told her. “I was just taking a chance when I strolled around to the back after there was no answer to my raps on your front door. Have you given up nursing in favor of taking in washing now?”

“No, mam, I ain't had no nussin' job in gwine on a month now. I'se just doin' my own fambly washin', least I is this mornin'. I does have two small washin's. I means I calls myself havin' two, but the folks didn't bring 'em last week, and they ain't brung 'em so far this week.”

I sat down and watched her as she worked. Mamie is a stout woman of medium height. Tightly braided gray hair framed her gingerbread-colored face, and she wore a nurses' soiled blue uniform, a white apron, black slippers, and gray cotton hose.

She spat into the tub of clothes, half-heartedly rubbed a garment across the washboard a time or two, stood up straight and said, “Miss, does you know where I can git a job?”

“No,” I replied.

“What!” she ejaculated. “Outen all the folks you knows!”

“That's true, Mamie, I surely don't know of a job you could get right now,” I told her, “but the National Reemployment Service will help you to get work if you'll register in their office.”

“I did try at that place. They axed me a hundred and one questions and then some: ‘What did you make? What did you spend your money for? Well, why didn't you save some of it while you was makin' it?’ They took all them questions and washed my face with 'em. I'll bet not a one of them folks that asks them questions saves none of their own wages, yet they goes right on askin' other folks questions they wouldn't wanta answer for nobody else. I told the one that axed me them things that the reason I couldn't save none of my money was that me and my fambly had to eat, buy clothes, and pay rent, let alone having to holp my people when they needed it. They's been a heap of colored folks gone hongry at times in these lest several years, when they own folks didn't have nothin' to ‘vide with 'em no mo'.

“I sho don't know what us pore Negroes is gwine do,” she grumbled. “When I first started to work I got more to do than I could keep up with. Now, folks goes to the hawspital, but when they gits back home some of they folks comes and stays with 'em 'til they's up and about again. I reckon folks just has to do that way to cut 'spenses.”

“How long have you been a nurse?” I asked.

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“Lemme see now, since 1924,” she answered. “You know I ain't no midwife; I'se a practical nurse. I'se holped doctors and midwives, and I'se maided and cooked. Lord, have mercy! I had to spend my money fast as I could git it feedin' my fambly, payin' house rent, and for all the things I told that man what axed so many questions at the ‘Ployment Office. I got my 'stificate to do practical nursin' in 1926. It took me 2 years to git it. It used to be anybody could wait on [?] ‘oman havin' a baby; they could go ahead and cut the cord and tie it if they knowed how. Now, that's all changed. If you don't have that 'stificate they'll put you in

the penitentiary for life. I hopes to git my next 'stificate in ‘bout another year, and then I can call myself a midwife and pull down $35 a week. Then I won't have to worry about my meat and bread no mo', leastwise not long as ‘omans keeps on havin' babies. I means to save up for a rainy day when I does git to makin' what a midwife should.

“I don't know when I was born ‘cause I didn't know nothin' t'all ‘bout my ma. I recomembers seein' my pa all right enough. I can guess at my age, but I really don't know jes' how old I is. I tells ever'body that. I 'spect I will be 'most forty-nine my next birthday. I was born on a farm down here in Clarke County, and all I ever done in my younger days mostly was work in the field. I'se just been in town ‘bout sixteen years. I used to have time and money to go see my folks, but I don't no mo'. Like I done told you, my ma died when I was a baby. My sister raised me part 4 of the way, then some white people took me up and I lived with 'em years and years. I lived and worked in the house with them white folks 'til I married.

“The first real nurse I ever seed was a white ‘oman what they called in to nurse one of the chillun that was took bad sick out in the country. One day that nurse went out in the yard to the lavatory - folks didn't have them places in the house to set on in the country. The lavatory was hid back of a grape arbor. She was passing under the arbor on her way back to the house when a bug got in her ear. She went to the kitchen, twisted a little white somepin' ‘round on a match stem, got some warm water and worked with her ear a long time. I thought that was fine doin's. I said to myself, ‘If she can do things like that, I can too.’ Right then and there I decided to be a nurse.

“Gittin' my first case come so easy that I thought nursing was going to be a reg'lar job. My husband's sister that was nursing a white ‘oman took sick and give me the job. I went there and liked the work and the white folks liked me. That $8 a week they paid me was a whole lots more'n I coulda made cookin', or maidin', or takin' in washin'. That was a good lady what I nursed. Her aunt said that shakin' disease she had was caused by her being a senarvis ([stenographer.?]). She had done worked her fingers so long on a typewriter that she 'most lost use of her hands and arms, and that condition spread over her whole body.

‘Oh, please rub my legs,’ she would say. ‘Oh, please scratch my head. If you will only rub my back; I'm so nervous.’ I had to be doing somethin' for her all the time, day and night.”

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Mamie stopped talking long enough to spit again into the tub of clothes and to rub a few strokes on the washboard. It seemed a good time for me to ask, “Why do you spit in the clothes?” She laughed heartily and was not the least embarrassed when she replied. “They tell me if you spit on dirty clothes it'll take the spots out when nothin' else will. So ever time I sees a bad dirty spot I just up and spits on it, and it 'most always comes out without no mo' trouble.

“This nursin' business,” she continued, “brings you up against all sorts of folks and things. Why, I even lost one job I had ‘cause the sick ‘omen told the doctor I had said her pulse was too fast. “Well, if she has to go ‘round tellin' sick folks such things, we'll let her go,’ he ‘lowed. I ain't never told no other sick folks ‘bout theyselfs no mo'.

“I couldn't git my 'stificate to do practical nursin' 'til I ob'-served at least one operation, and so I got my chanst when a white ‘omen what lived in the country come to her sister's house in town to have a tumor cut out. The colored nurse what was 'to holp the doctors and the white nurse got to poutin' so I had to take a hand, and not havin' done nothin' of the sort befo' I emptied out the water with the gauzes in it and they couldn't count 'em right. That sho lern't me a lesson, for when that patient didn't git well lak they thought she oughta, they made a ‘zamination and 'scovered that a gauze was sewed up in ‘er. Cutting her open again and takin' it out never 'mounted to nothin', so they done that out in the country in her own house, and she got well fast enough then. Now don't you 6 go blamin' them doctors. Them was grand doctors, but that little old room was too dark, in spite of that big old flashlight 'most long as my arm what her husband had bought when the doctors was fussin' ‘cause they wasn't no ‘lectric lights in that house where they done the first operation. Besides there was so much discharge they couldn't half see, and it was my fault for pouring out the water before them pieces of gauze could be counted. That colored

nurse that pouted and didn't do her part on that case lost out with the doctors and they don't never call on her no mo'.

“Another time I holped one of them doctors remove a big tumor from a colored women that had been suffering with it 30 years. It weighed nearly forty pounds on the cotton steelyards. I have worked for that doctor many times since. He is a good man and a fine doctor, but you better watch out and not make him mad.”

An Mamie rinsed the clothes in tubs of clear water, she told me something of the wide range of her experience in nursing. Maternity cases accounted for at least ninety percent of her patients, and her vivid descriptions ranked from the “pore white folks” and Negroes who knelt on the floor to give birth to their children, to the complications of a “Cessare-en” birth, made necessary by a fall that injured the mother three months before the baby was due. She had tended mothers and babies in the poorest of colored families, and in the homes of “uppity” white folks, who were able to employ a maid and a cook, in addition to a nurse to tend the mother and baby after they returned from the hospital. Patients with bladder disorders, cancers, nervous diseases - come what might - they were all accounted for in 7 in Mamie's story which came to an abrupt halt as she dropped the last wet bundle into her clothes basket.

“Well, I'se done got these clothes washed, now I'se got to hang 'em out,” she said, as she made a hasty excursion to the kitchen for clothespins. “Good Lord, Miss, it's done twelve-thirty! When does you eat?”

“Oh, not as long as you are willing to talk,” I told her. “I can eat any time.”

She went out in the yard and began to sing: “ Come to Jesus Now. “ Looking at me she said: “You can talk. I can hear you and ain't nobody else gwine to hear you.” I assured her I did not mind waiting until her work was finished.

“Just as soon as I hang these clothes out, I'se got to go down town, so you'd better ax me what you wants to know now.” She continued to hang out clothes. “So it's my schoolin' you wants to know ‘bout now?” she said. “I got as far as the second grade. That's how come I can't talk proper now; I didn't have ‘nough schoolin'. I went to school in Morton's Chapel. It was a church house. Us chillun went to school there during the week, and to church and Sunday School there on Sundays. That's the way colored folks done in them days. Now they's got a reg'lar schoolhouse.

“A blind ‘aman come through here once and give a music singin' at that church. We paid 10¢ a head to hear her sing. That was the way she had to make her livin'. She said her ma had fourteen chillun, seven born with sight, and seven blind. She was one of them blind ones. After the singing was over she said the church was a 8 great big Morton and a little bitty chapel, and that was sho what it was. Mr. Morton that give that chapel was one grand fine man.

“I don't hardly know how I met my husband. I believe when I met him he was with his first wife. I thought he was the prettiest man I ever seed, and he said he thought I was pretty too. He told me I had the prettiest legs; they was so big. I was just a little low squat. I never seed him no mo' in ‘bout four years. Then he was separated from his wife. When I seed him he was on the job. I knowed his face and he knowed mine. Us went together ‘bout a year befo' our marriage. Us got married all right but there wasn't no big weddin'; just a crowd of folks come to the house to see and hear the preacher say a little somepin' over us. Two of our fo' chillun is girls and the other two is boys.”

Mamie had finished hanging out the clothes and started in the house when a large German police dog come out of a dog house and barked at her. “I just hates this big old dog. I wish my son-in-law would come and git ‘im,” she complained. “I has to keep ‘im chained up so he can't run off.” She spoke to the snarling animal, “Now you just go on

back, ‘cause you ain't gwine to git none of this somepin' t'eat I'se got for my hog,” Picking up a market basket of bread scraps from the yard she sat it on the porch.

“Miss, if you wants me to talk to you, you'll have to come with we in my bedroom.” I followed her through the kitchen. “Come in here first. I wants you to see my daughter's room. She lives in [atlanta?] and she's gwine move her furniture when she gits a room there.”

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The room and its contents seemed clean but revealed no attempt at orderly arrangement. The conglomeration if its furnishings included a walnut bedroom suite which was crowded against chairs and tables of various kinds. A pink bedspread [clashed?] with the red drapes that framed the dingy [scrim?] curtains at the windows, and a cheap rug, of red rose pattern, added another wide splash of color.

We went to the kitchen where a round table, surrounded by chairs in the center of the room, was easily accessible to a small wood-burning cookstove. Pots, pans, dishes, and cutlery, as well as food, were scattered around apparently at random.

Passing through a narrow hall, we entered a bathroom which was complete with tub and other conveniences. The fixtures were cheap and crude, but they were a source of pride to Mamie. She lives in a house with a bath and an indoor “lavatory.” “Do nurses knows the needcessity of these things and us does without other things, but us has to have our bathrooms,” she declared.

The small hall also led to a room barely large enough for a battered iron single bed an old oak dresser. “I stripped this bed this morning,” Mamie declared, “and I ain't had time to make it up yit.” The mattress tick was split its full length, exposing lumps of dingy cotton. She opened another door, saying, “Come in here. This is my bedroom.” The two iron beds in her room had evidently seen much use and many coats of paint, which was flecking off now and revealed more then one color. There was no attempt at orderly arrangement if

the oak dresser, mahogany center table and its coal oil lamp, two rockers, and several split bottom chairs that were scattered about at a safe distance from the small heater.

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“Have a cheer,” was her attempt at hospitality, “and 'scuse me whilst I fixes my hair.” After several moments of vigorous wielding if the comb, she began replaiting her hair in tight braids that meandered at random about her head until the last lock of hair had been securely fastened in the braids. Few, if any, hairpins were necessary, for the hair was gathered up in such a manner that the braids did not form incipient “pigtails” but lay close against the scalp. This chore finished, Mamie put on a black hair, and said, “I'm going to git me somepin' t'eat; I can't do without food as long as you can.” She returned in a short time with a plate of biscuits and stewed fruit. “I would ask you to have some of these peaches and biscuits but I knows you wouldn't eat nothin' like this. This here fruit ain't got a bit of sugar in it ‘cause I didn't have none to sweeten it with.

“Workin' ‘round doctors has done learnt me that you has to eat keerful to keep well, even if you ain't got nothin' much to spend on eats. Too much breed by itself ain't good for folks, and these old peaches is got somethin' in 'em that I needs. ‘Cordin' to what I'se been told, they's better for me 'thout no sugar no how. One of the best doctors I works for - when they's any work for me to do - evermo' fusses down if he finds any of his patients that's old as I is eatin' sugar on grapefruits even. He says middle-aged folks ain't got no business stuffin' theyselfs with sweets and meats. Not that I'll ever be able to buy no mo' grapefruits, let alone sugar to go on 'em, lessen I can git me some work to do.

11

“No, mam, us don't own this house. Us pays $7 a month for it. Us used to pay $9 a month, but times got so tight the colored ‘oman what owns it had to cut the rent ‘cause us wasn't able to pay that much. All her chillun got grown and she picked up and went off to Detroit with 'em. Lord knows I couldn't pay no proper rent for a place like this with a lavatory and

plastered walls. I sho couldn't. I'se been livin' here five years this last gone August, long enough to own it.

“Sho, I belongs to the church. I'se a good old Baptist, I is. Why, I wasn't nothin' but a gal when I jined up with Morton's Chapel Baptist Church 'most nigh 30 year ago.

“Now I knows I'se told you just about all the spe-unces I'se ever had, and I can't stay no longer. And this is sho ‘nough; I 'spects you to gimme five cents to ride to town on the bus, ‘cause I'se too tired to walk. I knows you'se ‘[bleeged?] to be hongry, for one thing sho, you stayed right on here till you finished what you come for 'thout nothin' t'eat. That beats me how you done it, for I'se got to have my eats on time. It's ‘bout time for that bus. I thanks you for this nickel.”

On my second trip to Mamie's house she saw me before I reached the front door. “Just open the door and come on in,” she called. “What's the use of knockin' when I'se lookin' right at you. You sho does look hot, so have thet cheer over there by the window. A good breeze is comin' in there. What'd you fetch me? Seem's like to me if the government's payin' you for this story, you oughta pay me part of what you gits outen it.”

12

Mamie was ironing. Her ironing board was resting on the backs of split bottomed chairs. Large field rocks were placed on the seats of the chairs to keep them from tilting under the vigorous onslaught of her heavy iron. She was ironing a white uniform of the type usually worn by nurses, and did not make any further attempt to talk until the garment was carefully folded and placed across the back of a rocking chair. Then she unfolded a tightly wadded piece that proved to be a ragged pillow case and spread it out on the board. “If you'se noticin' this pillow case you might as well know it's mine, for I wouldn't wash nothing for white folks that was as ragged as this for fear they'd charge me for it claimin' I tore it up. Colored folks has had things like that to happen, but don't ask me no questions, for I

ain't goin' to tell no tales like that. They's apt to get Negroes into trouble, no matter how true they is.

“Did I tell you when you was here befo' that a lady that works at the college brought her washin' back to me lately after she done took it away from me and give it to somebody else. She pays me 75 cent a week for it now and it sho is worth ever cent of it and mo' besides. It tickled me for her to find out that other folks don't wash as good as I does, and 'sides I just bet she had to pay mo' to them others she tried out.

“The most I ever got in one week was $14 and that was on a nursin' job. I'll never forgit what the man said that hired me after my $14-a-week patient got to where she didn't need me no mo'. He didn't offer me but $10 a week, and I didn't want to take $4 lose than I had been gittin' and I told him so. 'mamie,’ he said, ‘I don't 13 make much myself, but whatever I promise to pay you you'llt git it and you won't have to wait for it.’ When I goes on a job I gives my whole time, night and day, ‘cept for 4 hours a day rest period, that any doctor'll tell you a nurse has gotta have if she is to stay on the job and be able to do what the patient needs her to do. Now you knows $10 a week ain't nothin' to pay for day and night services, and white folks wouldn't think of expectin' white nurses to work for such a little bit, and them white nurses does a heap less than me.

“On my last job I didn't git to take no 4 hours off ever’ day, for the patient told me she couldn't stay by herself a'tall. I was on that job day and night two weeks without no extra pay for over-time. These days, nursin' jobs is so hard to git that I'se home more'n I'se off nursin'. I never had but three jobs of nursin' all of last year; at one I stayed two weeks, three weeks at the second, and I was on night duty six months straight at the last place. Them first two places paid me $10 a week, and I got a dollar a night for the night duty.

“Ellen - that's my baby gal - got as far as the eighth grade in school. She works just any place she can git a job. Most of her work's been cookin' and maidin', for that's all she knows how to do. Whenever a colored girl tries to git into some other sort of work they's

allus asked, ‘What 'spe'unce is you had?’ If the new work is dif'rent from what they's been doin', they don't git it. How's they gwine to git 'spe'unce if nobody gives 'em a chanst? Answer me that!”

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“I don't know,” I told her, unless they take some sort of training for it.”

“My gal ain't able to pay for that,” Mamie answered. “Her baby goes to the WPA nursery school, and that's a big help when I'se off nursin' and that baby's ma's off huntin' work. She 'most allus gits around three dollars a week when she's got work, and I reckon she might work for less if anybody would hire her. But now ain't it a shame for folks to have to work for less then it takes for 'em to live on. she ain't got no work, she lives on me and her daddy; that's all she can do. Then when she does git somepin to do it takes all she can make to feed and clothe her and her child and to pay her part of our rent. When she ain't workin' she just mopes around here with me and her daddy. She ain't got no work now, and I reckon she's out huntin' a job, for she left out bright and early this mornin'.

“Our baby boy ain't married - not yit - and he's workin' his way through a school at Macon, Georgia. I don't know what he's gwine to take up. The school gits work for him to do. Right now they're tearing down old buildings on the campus and rebuilding 'em. My boy cleans them bricks and does anythin' else that comes to hand. I promised to pervide his clothes, but I ain't been able to give him nary a garment this year, ‘cause I ain't had no money to pay for no clothes with. This is his first year off from home, and he gits mighty homesick. He writes us they don't give him enough to eat down there. You see, me being a nurse, I knows ‘bout diet and things like that and I has to know how to feed folks so as they [eats'll?] do 15 the most good, and that's how come eatin' away from home don't satisfy none of my fambly.

“My oldest daughter went to the tenth grade, and since she's been out tryin' to holp make a livin' she's done ‘bout ever'thing that come to hand. She ain't never been able to give

us much towards payin' for eats, and rent, and the like, for it's allus took all she made to take keer of her own self. All my chillun holps me and they daddy with the fambly 'spenses when they's home and workin', but more'n often we has to holp them. But it was this oldest gal of ours I was tellin' you ‘bout. She done maidin' at a big furniture and undertakin' store here and made $4 a week long as she could hold out at it, and lemme tell you them folks had lotsa furniture for her to keep dusted and cleaned up. She was about the onliest one of my chillun that ever kept a study job. Since she got married her health's been so bad she has to stay in bed most of the time, and she don't give me one nickle no mo'. The doctor says she won't never be well no mo'. 'till she has a operation. She ain't able to pay for that and the Lord knows I ain't able to give it to ‘er.

“Our oldest boy lives in this town but he can't never seem to git nothin' much to do. He had to stop school to go to work in a drug store at $1 a week. He's got less schoolin' than any of the others, for he never went further'n the fourth grade. His wife gits two dollars and a half a week cookin' for a white ‘oman that just keeps her half the day. She ain't borned but one child since she and our son got married, and that little boy ain't big ‘nough to do nothin' but go to school yit.

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“All our chillun worked ever’ day after school was out, soon as they was big ‘nough and could git the work to do. The girls nursed. The most I ever got from their workin' after school and all day Saddays was a dollar and a half a week apiece, but as a rule I just got a dollar apiece. I took the money and bought books, tablets, pencils, and shoes and clothes. School supplies wasn't furnished by the State then, and by the time I paid out for all them things, there never was enough left to dress 'em right. They allus worked in vacation times if they could find the work to do. It was lots easier for 'em to find summertime work than it was in school time, for folks wanted workers that could stay all day on the job. Both the boys done most of they work 'twixt school hours at drug stores, carryin' packages, waitin' on curb trade, and doin' all sorts of odd jobs ‘bout them stores.

“When I first come to this town to live I didn't have no nursin' job, so I started out takin' in washin' for the mill folks. My prices was all ‘cordin' to how many was in the famblies, ‘bout a quarter of a dollar for each person in the fambly. Where a fambly had a papa, a mama, and one child, I usually got ‘bout seventy-five cents a week, and if they was five folks in the fambly they had to pay me a dollar and a quarter for a week's washin'. Takin' it all in all, by and large, I'se spent mo' of my life washin' than nursin'. There ain't been no rest for me only on Sundays, and not then when I'se got a nursin' job, for I [has?] to work to feed my fambly.

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“My husband mixes morter. When he can git ‘nough work to do we can make as much as $5 or $6 a week, but he don't hardly ever git more'n two weeks work in any month, and oftentimes not that much. White folks won't give ‘im no other sort if work, and no mo' of it - just a week or two, now and then. Folks is tellin' ‘round here that the white folks is done passed a law not to work middle-age men. That may be so, but they don't give colored folks no jobs no how, ‘cause if they would give my son a job, he could holp take keer of us. My son knows the mortar business just like his daddy; yet and still, he'll do anythin' he can find to do, but then he can't git a job.

“Now, you may not believe me, Miss, but I'so gwine tell you the truth, when us don't have no work to do, us just sets ‘round here hongry. Right now my house rent is way past due, and that rentin, agent is talkin' ‘bout puttin' us out iffen he don't git $10 to go on back rent right quick. Us used to pay our rent 'direct to the 'oman what owns the house. She lives in Detroit, like I done told you when you was here befo'. She got so tired foolin' with us gittin' behind so often and payin' in little old driblets, that she turned it over to a hard-boiled agent that'll set yo' things in the street in a hurry when you don't pay like he tells you to. We knows now we's got to git the rent cash from [somers?] and give it to ‘im on the dot.

“Right now, our water bill is on the cut-off list again, ‘cause us owes somepin more'n three dollars on back bills. They ain't cut it off yit, but they's apt to any minute. A notice come

in the mail this mornin' from the ‘lectric light folks, sayin' iffen us 18 don't pay that $2.66 us owes for lights they's gwine to cut 'em off. Well, if they does, I'll just start using my old kerosene lamp again.

“I'se tellin' you what's the truth; things is in a worser condition now than they's ever been in befo', since I come on this earth. When I was first married, ‘bout thirty year ago, it wasn't no effort to step out and get a job. If things got tight in town a person could go to the country and git work in the fields to holp out. Now you can't git nothin' to do in the country, for what few white folks is still runnin' farms ain't able to pay out much for wages. My cousin that lives in the country has a wife and eight chillun to bed, feed, and clothe, and he don't git but sixty cents a day. His wife has two little washin's. Come springtime, the chillun totes cotton seed and guano and draps corn. They chops cotton and in the fall they picks it, but none of them little jobs pays ‘nough to pay for the clothes they rots out with sweat whilst they's doin' the work.

“It used to be 'most any fambly could grow 'nough corn, wheat, potatoes, and sugarcane for syrup, to last 'em all winter. Now them folks what carries out government orders has cut down on 'em so, they don't have ‘nough home-raised victuals t'eat. I will say for 'em, they ain't cut down on potatoes and other vedibles yit - just mostly corn, wheat, and sugarcane, and, Oh, yes, I mustn't forgit, they's got hard-boiled ‘bout how much tobacco a man can raise. I reckon the folks that's at the tiptop head of the government knows what they's doin' when they fixes up they plans, but I don't believe they meant for the folks that carries out the orders to run things 19 like they does. If things was done just like our President wants 'em done I don't believe there'd be no hongry folks, or no folks sufferin' for lack of fire to warm by in cold weather, and no little chillun stayin, out of school, ‘cause they ain't got no clothes to wear to the schoolhouse in winter weather.

“White folks in gen'ral don't have no idea how us colored folks is sufferin'. If us was to try to carry our troubles to 'em, like us used to when ever’ colored fambly had some white fambly to look to, they wouldn't listen to us now. We wouldn't git nowhere with our story for they's

got troubles of they own. Since freedom come, the colored folks is done come so far from what they was befo' the war that white folks don't feel 'sponsible for 'em no mo'.

“ ‘most all colored folks in town tries to carry insurance to holp out when they gits sick and ‘nough to bury 'em with. I'se got one polish I pays 25¢ a week on. But country folks don't have no way to make extra twenty five cen-ses to pay on no insurance polish. It used to be they could bring chickens and eggs, vedibles, or whatever else they might have - sometimes melons and fruits - to town and swap 'em at the stores for coffee, sugar, and other things they needed. Now they don't have them things to bring, and if they does bring 'em, they can't swap 'em for nothin'. When a person that ain't got no insurance and no money dies, they's buried like a cat or a dog without no embalmin'. You can't 'spect them undertakers to do embalmin' for nothin'; It's 'spensive.

“When us first come to town to live, for a ‘oman to make 20 $4 a week washin' was considered big money. It took a heap of work to make that much; I knows, ‘cause I done it. My husband worked for the city till he fell off of one of them city trucks and broke his collar bone. After he got well they wouldn't take him back, even if he did git hurt doin' they work just like they told him to. Up to the time of his fall he was makin' $9 a week, but since that time he makes whatever folks is minded to pay him.

“Let me tell you the God's truth! Since 1932 lots of colored folks has died hongry. Look! See how big this dress hangs on me. I've lost ten pounds, and ever’ pound of it was lost ‘cause I didn't have ‘nough t'eat. I'll be glad if I ever see the day again when I can put my foots under somebody's table and eat a belly full one more time.

“Not long ago I axed a white ‘omen why colored folks couldn't git no work to do. She told me the Negro race had brought it on theyselfs. She said that when times was good and white folks would go to hire a cook or a nurse they would be told: ‘Us ain't workin' out no mo'. Us is lookin' for a cook, a washerwomen, or a nurse ourselfs.’ She say our sassy

ways like that is why the white folks don't pay us no mo' heed since times is done got so tight they ain't no jobs for us.

“It ain't been long since I axed a white ‘omen to loan me $5 to holp me out of a awful tight. She lied when she told me with a straight face that she just didn't have it. I knowed she did have it ‘cause some of her folks had just died and left her a sight of money. The only way she could make be believe she ain't got it now would be to git the Good Lord to come down as a natural man, and tell me she ain't got that much money she don't need that she could loan me. One thing 21 sho, these folks that's got so much can't take none of it with 'em so all right, I say, let 'em keep they old money. Say, listen, now ain't the government got some sort of office in town where they can loan out money to holp pore folks to git back on they foots after they's done got down and out? No, I don't mean no Rural Rehab's business; I means just a straight out loan? Well, iffen you don't know ‘bout it, I don't 'spect they's no such place here; but if they was they sho would do a big heap of business.

“A little flour and a very little coffee is all they is in this house t'eat today. Soon as I gits the 75¢ for this washin' I aims to take it and buy us some meat. My husband ain't had but one day's work this week and he won't git no pay befo' Sadday, and that day's work don't come to but a dollar.

“The older doctors used to look out for us [practical?] nurses, but these younguns what's doin' the doctorin' now don't do that no mo'. And I liked the ways the older doctors had of lookin' after sick folks lots better'n I does the young doctor's ways. Befo' one of them old-time doctors would leave, they'd ax you lots of questions ‘bout how you meant to handle the patient till they found how much you knowed, and then they'd tell you how in much a nice way that it seemed like they was just offerin' suggestions, but you knowed better'n to fail to do what they suggested. These here young doctors rushes in and out like bats out of torment, and befo' you knows it they's gone without tellin' you nothin'. Yet, if anythin' goes wrong it's sho to be all your fault. They ain't quite all of the youngsters that bad. I marked for one young 22 doctor here lest year that advised with me plenty and allus axed

me questions till he was satisfied I knowed how to treat his patient. Take them old doctors; when one of them come to see a patient and saw he was sufferin' he allus give somethin' to ease the pain if it was needed. These yere younguns just stays long enough to take the temperature, feel the pulse, and tell the nurse to slap a [ice?] [cap?] on the patient's head till the ambulance can git there to take ‘im to the hawspital. Then the pore nurse is left without no job, and the patient is feeing the expense of a operation. Gimme them good old doctors - do you hear me? - any day in the week.

“When a doctor takes a patient that's got money to the hawspital, he's charged like ‘30 going North,’ but if sick folks and they famblies ain't got nothin' the charges is sometimes reasonable enough for operations and sich like. I ain't never had to pay for none of them things for myself, ‘cause I ain't never been to no hawspital to be cut nowheres, and I hopes I never will have to go.

“I known I axed you the last time you was here, but, Miss, in all your gittin' ‘round and talkin' to so many folks, don't you never hear of no job you could pint out to me? I ain't only a good nurse and a washerwoman, but I can cook good too. I don't like cookin', but I can do it, and do a fine job of it, if I do say so my own self. One thing sho, I ain't able to do no mo' big heavy washin's like I used to, but if I can't git me nothin' else to do I'll have to git another small washin'. Now, why don't you lemme try your washin'? I knows you'd 23 like the way I does washin' and ironin'.” Remembering how often I had seen her spit on the clothes when I was taking her first interview, I hastily told Mamie that mine was a heavy washing, for my children in school needed so many clothes that it would be too much of a burden on her.

“You sho don't need me to tell you no mo',” she grumbled, “for I'se done told you all I ever did know, and 'sides I'se hongry now and I wants to hurry through this ironin' so I can go after my money and git me somepin t'eat.” Recognizing her intention to end the conversation, I gathered up my notes and prepared to leave.

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“If you ever does have to come back, tell them government folks you works for to send me some money for this talkin' I'se done for you.” As I started out of her room, Mamie said, “ 'scuse me, Miss, for not stoppin' to go to the door with you, but I can't play with this yere ‘lectric iron, like I could them old flat irons us used to heat on charcoal buckets.” She stuck a finger in her mouth and then applied it to the iron. I could hear the sizzle of the spittle, which proved to her that the iron was hot enough to work on starched cloths. I thanked her and left. She called after me, “Don't you forgit to write it down straight that I ain't no midwife yit. They puts folks in jail that says they's midwifes and can't show no 'stificate.”